MARY ROBERTS RINEHART TALKS OF BABIES AND FIRES

As the Author Talked of Her Granddaughter a Blaze Brought the Engines Booming by, the Set Interview Went Bang! But What an Intimate Glimpse of Herself!—By Clara Whiteside

Yours for Service
Mary Roberts Rinehart

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Mary Roberts Rinehart, 2d, the author's first grandchild

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MARY ROBERTS RINEHART has just passed a psychological milestone; her oldest boy, who married last year, has made her a grandmother at the age of forty-three.

"I'm quite conscious of having passed this milestone," she declared feelingly, "but I passed it with great pride."

In the meantime, little Mary Roberts Rinehart, 2d, familiarly known in the family as "Babs," although she has turned a mother into a grandmother, is resting quite undisturbed by this fact, as well as by the honor of bearing so distinguished a name. Like her small granddaughter, the dignity and responsibility of her position and added honor sit lightly on the shoulders of this popular writer. It was all there in her voice, and I was quite impressed by her manner until—clang! down the street thundered a fire-engine. Like lightning came the metamorphosis. Up she sprang, up went the window and out went her head!

"Why, I do believe it's really a fire!" she exclaimed delightedly. "Come look," she called. As far out as she could lean, unmindful of any possible injury to gown or person, she was oblivious of everything but the volumes of smoke from the nearby building and the clatter in the street below.

"Why don't the firemen hurry?" she asked excitedly. "I suppose each action tells though"—to herself.

"Oh, look at the men coming up through that trapdoor!" she cried, completely lost in the spirit of the moment. Interviewers were, for the time being, quite forgot.

HAD she said "grandmother" or had I dreamed it? No, it was certainly true; but I had learned one thing, that love and pride enter mostly into the make-up of some grandmothers and that a feeling of age and too much dignity are not necessary, are only handicaps. Roads to babies' hearts are very straight for grandmothers when love and pride lead the way. Back she turned from the window with a sigh (the fire had not come up to expectations), but the sigh quickly became a smile as she dropped into a chair and said:

"A racing fire-engine or a circus parade always takes me back to my childhood. The single dramatic moment of the whole day, then, was when I heard the fire-engine and saw it tearing down the street. It represented excitement, romance and adventure, and all the rest of childhood's dreams. The circus came less often, but was almost as thrilling.

"I remember, several years ago, I must have rather stunned a dignified publisher, who came to see me at my apartment in New York. But he was a good sport, as you will see. It was evening. He was talking very interestingly about fire-engines, when out the window I saw a bright red glare. I jumped up.

"'I'm awfully sorry,' I said, 'but I have to go to this fire!' So he picked up his high silk hat and went with me. I'm not bloodthirsty, but when there is a fire I have to be there."

After fifteen years of hard work Mrs. Rinehart finds it hard to relax. At present she is trying to eliminate the short work with which she usually fills in her year. Her new novel, "The Poor Wise Man," to be published in October, she began last August and worked steadily on till the middle of January—straight ahead every day. She wrote the book in longhand with pen and ink and then rewrote it after it had been typed, making a total of 300,000 words.

"I still have not recovered from the strain," she told me. "While I was working on the book," she continued, "I had some fear of writer's cramp and endeavored to use the typewriter, but I found myself so busy looking at the letters on the machine I could think of nothing to say."

Every morning about 8 o'clock, after giving her orders for the day, she leaves her home in Sewickley and motors into Pittsburgh to her city office. Sewickley is twelve miles from Pittsburgh, and it has been her home for many years.

"I never have been able to wait for a time to write. Automatically, as soon as I reach my office, I pick up my pen and go to work. Concentration comes easy. When I am working on a novel I am apt for a few months to put everything out of my life but the work I am engaged on. Except an occasional dinner I don't go out socially, just write steadily from six to eight hours a day."

"Do you find it easier to write now than when you first began?" I asked the novelist.

"Yes, it is easier to write," she answered, "but I myself am more critical of my work. I work harder all the time, but am less satisfied with the result. Writing with me in infinite labor and great discouragement. I used to read book reviews for criticism of my work, but I found that opinions were so diverse it was impossible to get any idea of a real estimate. One praised; another tore down. I stopped reading them years ago.

"While I do not read book reviews, I do read with immense care all the mail that comes to my desk every day and answer all letters, good, bad and indifferent; for I insist that people who write to me must have a reply. With the development of my business—with the theatre and the moving pictures being added to my other work—my mail has grown to the point where I am unable to answer it personally. My husband is now my business manager and has taken over the correspondence. It covers all subjects. All sorts of questions are asked me—intimate personal ones, abstract inquiries on economics and politics, requests for autographs, autograph books and photographs and always a certain percentage of begging letters. Also there are always a number of fine and encouraging letters, which keep me busy answering them and living up in my work to the ideals and standards they have set for me."

From a novelist to a playwright is an easy transition, at least Mrs. Rinehart found it so. She has just finished her fifth play. This last one is in collaboration with Avery Hopwood, and the rehearsals for it are now well under way.

"I have to break in on these rehearsals and run to California to cut and write the titles of my new 'moving picture,' a comedy photoplay called 'It's a Great Life.' This is my second photoplay. The first one is called 'Dangerous Days,' recently finished in New York, and I am now at work on the third. Since I began writing for the screen and more recently putting on my own productions, we have had a 'moving picture' projector installed in our home. I find it a good way to see and study picture production at close range. The 'moving picture' addition to my work necessitates my going to the coast about three times a year.

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"'HOW do I play?' Well, I never have been able to take my play with my work. I must play all at once. It is always hard for me to relax, so when I take a vacation it must be a real one. Long horseback trips with my family are the best recreation I know anything about, and until the war broke in on them it was a family habit to go West every summer. Since the war we have not been able to get back the habit. This year, however, my husband and my two younger boys and I plan to ride in the Rockies in July and August, probably taking our usual camp outfit. Each night we camp in a new place, preferably on the banks of a trout stream or lake. If the fishing is good we stay several days."

"Tell me how a business woman like yourself keeps house," I asked, "and does the servant problem bother you?"

"I never had a servant problem in my life," she replied, tapping wood. "I have no particular secret. I have had my servants a long time and regard them as part of my business organization. Unless my house is running smoothly I cannot work. The personal equation enters into the servant problem more than in almost any other in which employment is involved. In the first place, I have to like the people who are in my house; then, for success, the feeling must be reciprocal—they must like me. That achieved, there is no longer any question of grudging service. My servants are well paid, well housed, well fed and have proper hours for recreation and, because I do appreciate the efforts they make, I believe in showing them appreciation."

"Like every other housewife, I am facing the problem of the high cost of living. We all know that forty-three cents is all a dollar is worth, and I do not look for any decrease of prices. There must be an increase all along the lines, in salaries, to meet the rising demands. After the Civil War, prices never went back to what they were before, although they lowered somewhat. The difficulty today seems to be that, while employers of labor have recognized the dollar at forty-three cents, employers of people in salaried positions have not yet done so. I do wish that women would begin to train their daughters in some useful profession. No matter how remote the possibility of their ever needing to earn their living, it is a wise thing to equip a girl should this necessity arise. That is why I am interested in the case of Bryn Mawr College."

"Would you tell me something about your ideas in regard to clothes, and the way a business woman should dress?" I asked again, and Mrs. Rinehart very quickly replied that the way a business woman buys clothes and the way other women buy is, in her opinion, a very "different proposition."

"I never have developed the shopping habit," she told me. "Women who have the time and don't know what to do with it go shopping, and this accounts for big bills from department stores, utterly unnecessary. My system in replenishing my wardrobe consists in going to New York three times a year, and knowing in advance just what things I need I go to the best dressmakers and they do the rest. After that, aside from seeing things are kept in order, I forget about clothes entirely. I never shop, in any sense of the word, at all. I believe a business woman should be as well dressed as possible, in quiet, well-made clothes, absolutely inconspicuous." Many of Mary Roberts Rinehart's war experiences are still fresh in our memory, but perhaps we do not remember it was as a trained nurse, as well as a writer, she was permitted to go into the war zone.

"The fact that I was a graduate trained nurse," she said, "made me hope that, although my boy was in service, they would still accept my help and let me go across. At first this request was denied, but subsequently, in 1915, I was permitted to go and had a wonderfully interesting experience, spending some time at every front of the army." (She was decorated by the queen of Belgians for services to Belgium and interviewed the queens of Belgium and England for the Saturday Evening Post, also General Foch.)

"I got to France that year by 'stowaway' across the channel. It was arranged that I should be met at Calais by an officer of the Belgian army, but when I got to Folkestone to take the boat I found it had been forbidden to carry passengers across the channel, as word had just reached England the Germans had announced they would sink all ships going in that direction. What should I do? Go back and face defeat? Not if I could help it. Two boats were tied up at the quay. One was the Bolougne boat ready to sail, but the Calais boat was dark. I made an appeal to the captain of the Calais boat to take me across, but he refused. It was 3 o'clock in the morning and raining heavily. There seemed a slim chance that by taking advantage of the night, the darkened boat and the confusion of departure I might be able to slip in unobserved. I determined to try. So I stood at the end of the quay and waited for my opportunity, which came sooner than I expected. Reaching the cabin unobserved, I locked myself in and went to sleep. The boat was tied up at the wharf at Calais when I awakened. It was a gray dawn and still raining. I got off without being noticed, was met by the Belgian officer, who took me directly to the front. Of course later on, when precautions were more rigid, this 'stowaway crossing' would not have been possible, but it succeeded beautifully then."

"Succeeding beautifully" has now become a habit with this writer. You can hardly call it luck nor altogether talent, for good hard work and much common sense has had something to do with results. She works and plays equally hard and faces her milestones unafraid.

LIFE AT 60 BELOW

By Edwin Tarrisse

"LOOK out, or you will drop that chisel!" Before the sentence was finished the tool had slipped from the hand of my assistant and, striking upon some bar iron, flew into pieces as if it had been glass instead of steel."

This reads like a bit out of "Alice in Wonderland," but is sober fact, as told by an American formerly engaged in various enterprises at Dawson, in the Yukon territory.

It is interesting to learn what happens at 60 degrees below zero, a temperature not uncommon in the Yukon. For example, the gentleman mentioned tells of one stretch of such cold in January, a spell that endured two weeks. The temperature ranged from 44 degrees below zero (the warmest) down to 68 degrees below. Some of the outlying Yukon police stations reported 80 degrees below. These cold waves alternate with warmer periods of 10 degrees below.

At such temperatures as these strange manifestations appear. One is the way a fire burns in the stove. It roars and crackles like a great forge, and wood in the stove seems to dissolve in the flames like a chunk of ice; the wood is gone and one wonders where the heat went.

At 60 degrees below every stovepipe throws out a great white cloud of smoke and vapor, resembling a steamboat in its whiteness, and this cloud streams away for from 50 to 100 feet, mingling with the other white-gray mist or haze that remains permanent in the atmosphere of the town like a great fog when it is 40 degrees or more below zero. This white-gray fog is not fog as we know it, but is frozen fog, and every man, woman, child, animal and even the fire that burns is throwing out moisture into the air, which is immediately turned into a cloud of frozen vapor that floats away and remains visibly suspended in the air. Very slowly this settles to earth; and in the morning, about the steps and any protected place, one can see a very fine film of flour-like dust deposited, which is composed of frozen vapor.

Exposed ears, hands and noses freeze at this temperature in going the distancee of about one city square. The breath roars like a mild jet of steam, while a dipper of boiling water thrown out into the air emits a peculiar whistling as its drops circle through the frosty atmosphere.

Prospectors, in attempting to boil a dish of rice or beans upon a camp fire unprotected from the weather, find that the side of the dish that is in the fire will boil, while the part of the dish exposed to the weather has frozen. To remedy this, the dish is set completely into the fire. Edged tools subjected to this temperature become as hard and brittle as glass and will break readily under strain. All vegetables, potatoes, apples, fruit, eggs, and the like, can be allowed to freeze until they become like bullets. To make ready for use, place them in cold water half a day before using, and the frost will slowly withdraw without injury to the food. To attempt to thaw them out by more rapid process by fire or hot water spoils them for use.

Some remarkable tales are told of thawing out a frozen foot, ear or hand by immersing the member in coal oil for some time—often several hours.

This, it appears, is an absolutely safe remedy, and one thus escapes the surgeon's knife, as no bad results follow. One man was saved by a night watchman, who found the unfortunate man in the snow (45 degrees below zero) and both hands frozen to the wrists. He was taken into the office and treated as above for about five hours, when all the frost was drawn out without so much as losing a fingertip. The physicians were amazed, as they thought amputation would have to be employed in this case. His hands were as white and hard as marble, and when placed in the oil they snapped and crackled as the oil began to act upon the ice crystals.

In such temperatures one must be very careful about touching things with unprotected hands. It is dangerous to take hold of a door knob when it is 60 degrees below zero or thereabouts with the uncovered hand, unless one is careful instantly to release his hold, for if he does show this carelessness the inner palm of his hand will be frozen in five seconds. The result is the same as though he had touched a red-hot stove.

Great spikes, used in constructing the frames of buildings, when subjected to this frigid temperature contract where embedded in the wood, and when the clinging fiber of the wood can no longer control the contraction, the shrinking spikes give a great jump in the wood, this being accomplished by a loud booming sound like the firing of a heavy gun, or that of a building struck with a sledge hammer. As there happen to be more than one spike in the structure there is, therefore, not one but many of these explosions, which resemble the sounds from a target range.

Coal oil begins to thicken at 40 degrees below, and at 60 and 70 degrees below becomes as thick as lard and looks very much like that substance, only a little darker. It can then be cut out of the can with a knife in the same way that one cuts lard or butter. A lighted lamp or lantern left exposed in this temperature will freeze up and go out in about eighty minutes.

A Revised Version

THE following is a darky preacher's version of the parable of the Good Samaritan:

"Dere was a traveler on a lonely road, robbed an' left wounded an' helpless by de wayside. As he laid dere various pussons passed him, but none of dem offers him 'sistance. By and by, however, a pore Samaritan comes along, an', takin' pity on de wounded man's trouble, helped him on his mule an' took him to a tavern, where he orders food an' drink an' clothes for de man an' tells de tavernkeeper to send de bill to him. An' dis is a true story, brethren," concluded the preacher, "for de tavern is standin' yit, an' in de doorway is standin' de skeleton of de tavernkeeper waitin' for de Good Samaritan to come back an' pay de bill."

Appreciative

A YOUNG lawyer had a foreign client in police court the other day. It looked rather black for the foreigner, and the youthful attorney fairly outdid himself in trying to convince the magistrate that his client was innocent of the charge brought.

The attorney dwelt on the other's ignorance of American customs, his straightforward story, and upon other details sufficient to extend the talk fully fifteen minutes. His client was acquitted.

In congratulating the freed man the lawyer held out his hand in an absent but rather suggestive manner. The client grasped it firmly.

"Eet was verra fine noise you mak'," he said. "Moocha thanks. Goo'-by."